

Paul Newland and Brian Hoyle (eds.), *British Art Cinema: Creativity, Experimentation and Innovation* (Manchester University Press, 2019), pp. 288, 13 illus. (b/w), ISBN 9781526100870 (hb), £85.

If Truffaut's infamous observation about the incongruity between the terms 'British' and 'cinema' is now largely quashed by a weight of scholarship and critical consensus, the idea of an incongruity between 'British cinema' and 'art cinema' is unquestionably still pervasive. This only accentuates the importance of this wide-ranging and carefully researched collection, in which the 'lost' lineage of British art cinema is rediscovered and emergent paradigms investigated and integrated.

*British Art Cinema* spans a broad and eclectic continuum of art cinema, from documentary (Humphrey Jennings, John Krish, and films on art funded by the Arts Council); amateur film (the Scottish-Italian filmmaker Enrico Coccozza); ground-breaking sixties productions (such as those of Nic Roeg, Losey/Pinter and Ken Russell); Black British Cinema (Horace Ové, Black Audio Film Collective); poetic/social realism (Ken Loach); and the collision between 'poor cinema' (Colin McArthur's term for a cinema austere in resources but rich in imagination) and art cinema from the late 1970s onwards, exemplified here by the work of Derek Jarman, Peter Greenaway, Terence Davies, Chris Petit, Don Boyd (as creative producer) and Sarah Turner. This is by no means an exhaustive list – the canonical work of Powell and Pressburger recurs throughout, for example, and forms a major part of Brian Hoyle's illuminating chapter on the 'twin traditions' of the biopic and the composed film in British art cinema.

After an introduction by Newland and Hoyle which utilizes but also grapples critically with definitions of art cinema provided by Andrews (2013), Bordwell (1979) and Neale (1981), these key interventions in the debate around art cinema are repeatedly referenced and reflected upon in the subsequent chapters, giving a real consistency to the book's theoretical framework. It takes great skill on the part of the contributors to be able to tackle the complexities and vagaries of art cinema in such short chapters, and great skill in editing a collection to draw such disparate threads together. Some chapters, like Tom Ryall's (on the 1920s work of Alfred Hitchcock and Anthony Asquith) and Robert Shail's (on Krish), whilst rich and absorbing, do seem to conclude before the authors have had a chance to properly develop a thesis or functional approach. By contrast, Owen Evans manages to shed fresh light on Jennings as the kind of 'expressive individual' Bordwell has argued is indispensable to art cinema (34), through adopting an interdisciplinary close visual/textual analysis that juxtaposes Jennings' documentaries with his paintings and poetry.

Another firmly interdisciplinary chapter is Jo George's impressive contribution on Derek Jarman, which vividly depicts how Jarman's work is steeped in influences from medieval literature and poetry, and which makes revelatory connections in positing his trance films as a contemporary analogue of the dream allegory motif found in epics such as William Langland's late fourteenth-century dream-vision *Piers Plowman* (206). George's chapter is exemplary of the book's success in showcasing some remarkable work by newer voices in film studies, and it is generally these chapters which have the freshest insights, and which persist in the memory the longest. It is surely no coincidence that these chapters generally happen to be the ones which valorise areas of film culture that are marginalised or ripe for revision. One slight exception to this 'rule' is the chapter on the working relationship between Joseph Losey and Harold Pinter; as Peter Jameson notes at the outset, the combined cultural cachet of director and playwright (Jameson cautiously proposes a 'joint auteur' position; 103) appears to have elevated their film collaborations to 'Anglo-European art cinema' status, in the words of Nick James in *Sight and Sound*, 19: 6 (2009). Jameson's chapter is a model of how to conduct close textual analysis deftly and with brevity. It could easily form the basis of teaching sessions on adaptation and cinematography, and how the production process achieves a creative and delicate balance between page and screen. Similarly, film studies lecturers teaching

Black British Cinema can look no further than Sally Shaw's chapter on Horace Ové's *Pressure* (1975) and Paul Elliott's chapter on Black Audio Film Collective and Latin America. Shaw's chapter nicely combines historical context on Trinidad and Tobago with a revealing interview with the filmmaker, thereby generating new understandings of authorial intent and the stylistic and generic innovations within the film. Elliott's chapter offers an accessible overview of complex debates within Third Cinema and chronicles pivotal Black Audio films, including *The Last Angel of History* (1996), a pioneering video-essay on Afrofuturism.

What David Forrest identifies as the 'apparent incompatibility between British realism and British art cinema' is a fascinating issue, and Forrest cites Brian Hoyle's doctoral work on British art cinema as an example of an 'inclusive and historically sensitive' (157) approach that does not disregard British New Wave and social realism (including television plays such as those of Mike Leigh and Alan Clarke). Forrest notes the way in which Loach has vigorously denied that he makes 'elitist or arty' films (ibid.) as evidence of the disconnect between art cinema's aesthetics of ambiguity and social realism's political commitment, but it is also worth taking heed of the question recently posed by Steve Rose in the *Guardian* (28<sup>th</sup> October) of whether 'Loach's stories of bottom-rung strife are primarily consumed by middle-class cinephiles'.

Aside from Katerina Loukopoulou's chapter on art films in post-war Britain, which condenses a wealth of research and historical detail on the role of cultural subsidy in breaking down barriers between art and film, such issues of taste and cultural value are recurrent but surprisingly understated within the collection. Ryan Shand, for example, wears his archival learning lightly, marshalling a range of primary sources to demonstrate the cynicism and hostility often expressed within amateur film clubs, festivals and publications to the kind of experimentation undertaken by amateurs like Enrico Coccozza. Nonetheless, he concludes that 'the avant garde, art cinema and popular culture have historically had more in common than has perhaps been admitted by scholars of British cinema' (83).

Elsewhere there is a vague intimation that hierarchies of taste can be collapsed in a historical approach that embraces the eclecticism and impurity of art cinema. The predominance of male, white auteurs within the pantheon of art cinema is seldom alluded to, although it is implicitly challenged through the inclusion of insightful chapters by Shaw on Ové's *Pressure* (1975) and by Kim Knowles on Sarah Turner's *Perestroika* (2009). Overall, film scholars are fortunate for the arrival of this book, which alongside Geoff King's complementary new monograph *Positioning Art Cinema: Film and Cultural Value* (Bloomsbury, 2019), should bolster the status of British art cinema as an inexhaustibly rich mine to seam.